NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

LAND CLEARING

(Acre)

CODE 460

DEFINITION

Removing trees, stumps, and other vegetation from wooded areas.

PURPOSE

To achieve needed land use adjustments and improvements in the interest of soil and water conservation and in keeping with the capabilities of the land.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to wooded areas where the removal of trees, stumps, brush, and other vegetation is needed in carrying out a soil and water conservation plan, and the land to be cleared will be used according to its capabilities.

CRITERIA

The plan shall specify the kinds of timber to be harvested, harvest methods, equipment used and the location of access roads, skid trials and logging landings (refer to standard 655 – Forest Trails and Landings). When a consulting forester assists with planning, the consultants' Forest Harvest Plan should address this portion of the standard.

All clearing and disposal methods shall be performed according to applicable federal, state, and local laws with due regard for the safety of persons and property.

Debris removal methods shall be developed and include in the plan prior to initiation of any land clearing activity.

Strip clearing and windrowing of debris shall be conducted perpendicular to the slope to prevent accelerated erosion.

If berm piles are to be burned, follow all federal, state and local fire regulations, permits and ordinances.

Methods for sediment and erosion control shall be included in the plan prior to initiating any land clearing activities. The method, timing, etc. of the land clearing shall result in the minimum disturbance of topsoil. The plan shall also include measures to protect the cleared area from erosion and adjacent areas from sediment, nutrients and pesticides.

The cleared area shall be left in a neat and sightly condition that will facilitate the planned use and treatment of the land.

The plan shall not be considered complete until the converted landuse is established.

CONSIDERATIONS

Special attention shall be given to maintaining or improving habitat for fish and wildlife where applicable. Consideration of such things as strip clearing, windrowing debris and maintaining den and food trees shall be explored.

Special attention shall be given to maintaining onsite wetlands; as well as protecting nearby streams, rivers, lakes, ponds and wetlands.

Agricultural producers should also consider the Highly Erodable Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation Compliance provisions of the U.S. Farm Bill and how the land clearing operation could affect their eligibility for U.S.D.A programs.

Consider land clearing during dryer periods of the year to minimize disturbance to the soil. The harvesting operation can be conducted in the winter months under snow and frozen conditions.

Consider the type and size equipment based on its intended use and site conditions. The type of equipment selected for harvesting should be based on the type and amount of wood to be harvested as well as the sensitivity of the site. Select equipment size that will handle clearing tasks in a timely manner while still protecting the integrity of the soil. Harvesting and clearing methods should be considered that minimize the extent of disturbed ground surface as well as minimize the depth of disturbance.

The orientation and layout of berm piles should be considered. The pile should be high, narrow and compact, and free of topsoil. Berms should normally be 15 to 25 feet wide and 10 to 15 feet high and are spaced 150 to 250 feet apart. A break of 30 feet between berms is recommended for every 200 feet of berm length to act as a firebreak, allow for drainage and to facilitate access.

If debris is to be buried, select the areas that are deep to bedrock and where remaining fill can be spread without increasing erosion and sedimentation.

Consider the effects on the water budget, especially on volumes and rates of runoff, evaporation, and transpiration. Effects on erosion and the movement of sediment, pathogens, and soluble and sediment attached substances carried by runoff.

Consider developing a conservation plan for the area that addresses resource concerns under the converted landuse.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for land clearing shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose. As a minimum, the plans and specifications shall include, as applicable, the following items:

- Limits of area to be cleared
- Location of disposal areas
- Locations of areas off limits to disposal
- Location of trees and woody materials to be left undisturbed
- Method of harvesting, including equipment types
- Method of disposal
- Erosion control measures during and after the land clearing until the intended landuse is established
- Methods to avoid and protect wildlife habitat, wetlands, cultural resources, and other environmentally sensitive areas

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An Operation and Maintenance Plan must be prepared for use by the landowner or operator responsible for the land clearing. The O&M plan for land clearing shall be effective from the time the land clearing operation is started to the time the intended landuse is established. Minimum O&M components shall be:

- Method to establish and maintain desired vegetative cover to prevent erosion
- Measures to protect watercourses from sedimentation and contaminants
- Use of mechanical treatments and chemical applications to control undesired species